



My Russian Neighbor Whispers in Secret

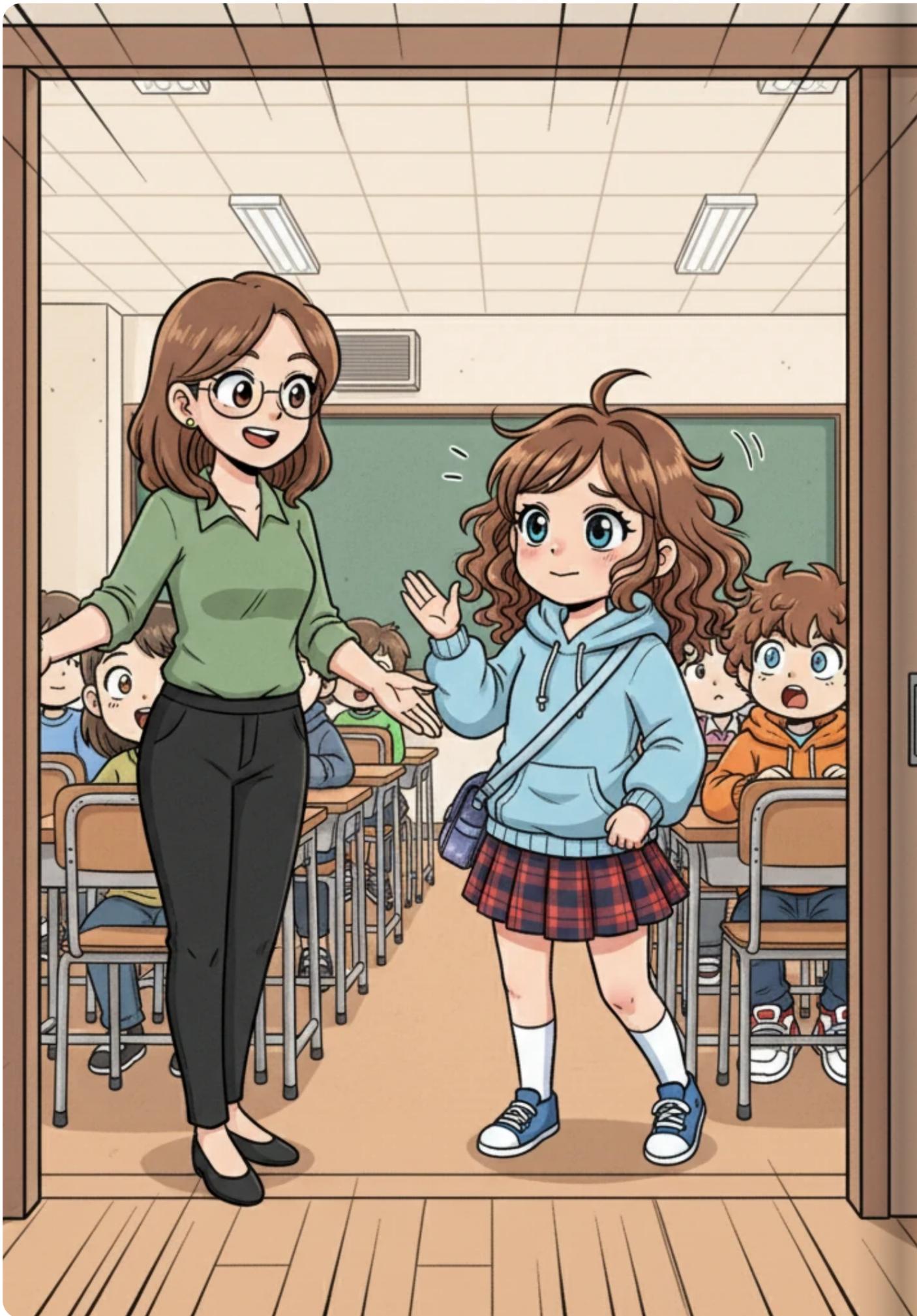
Ayam Ghanta



It was the first day of 8th grade, and Ayam, as always, retreated to the back bench. He was a perpetually shy and introverted boy, always hoping to blend into the background, unnoticed by anyone. His hunched posture and downcast eyes were a familiar sight.



His best friend, Yuje, was Ayam's complete opposite – charming, athletic, and incredibly attractive. Whenever Yuje walked through the corridor, whispers would erupt among the girls, "Look, it's Yuje!" "He's so cool!" He effortlessly commanded attention.



But on this particular day, all eyes shifted away from Yuje, turning instead towards the classroom door. The class teacher, with a warm smile, announced, "Students, meet our new transfer student from Russia, Alya."



Alya stepped inside, her golden blonde hair shimmering in the sunlight like spun gold. Her eyes were a striking, crystal-clear blue, captivating everyone. A pin-drop silence fell over the entire classroom, broken only by the soft rustle of her uniform. Ayam, lifting his gaze from his notebook, found himself staring, utterly mesmerized. He had never seen anyone so beautiful.



Alya gave a slight, graceful bow. "Privet... I mean, Hello," she said, her voice soft but clear. "I am Alya. Nice to meet you." Her accent was subtly different, adding an intriguing layer of mystery to her presence.



The teacher smiled kindly. "Alya, please take the empty seat next to Ayam." Ayam's heart pounded furiously in his chest. 'Next to me? Why?!' he thought, a wave of panic washing over him. The world seemed to tilt.



Alya began walking towards him, her movements light and elegant. She pulled out the chair beside Ayam's desk, and as she settled down, a faint, sweet scent of vanilla and roses drifted towards him. It was an unexpected, delicate fragrance.



Alya glanced at Ayam and offered a small, polite smile. Ayam, completely frozen by nervousness, could only manage to quickly lower his head. He frantically began drawing random lines in his notebook, desperate to avoid eye contact.



Just then, a soft murmur came from beside him. Alya quietly mumbled something in Russian: "Etot paren' vyglyadit takim neryashlivym..." Ayam didn't understand Russian, but a cold dread settled in, making him fear she had said something unflattering.



Then, Alya spoke in clear English, "Excuse me, can I borrow a pen? My bag is still on its way." Yuje, who was seated in front, immediately spun around, his brightest smile plastered on his face. "Sure! I can lend you one!" he offered eagerly. However, Alya ignored Yuje completely, her crystal blue eyes fixed solely on Ayam, patiently awaiting his answer.